

# Taung farmers receive harvester to boost crop production

By Glenneis Kriel | 5 March 2024 | 6:00 am

*Huge benefits for North West farmers as they receive much-needed equipment, writes Glenneis Kriel.*



From left: Richards Segwai, Lucia Towe, Victoria Seikaneng, Matthews Senokwane and Moses Maqebelo stand in front of the harvester the farming community acquired with the help of FarmSol and SACTA.

*Photo: Glenneis Kriel*

Thirty-five farmers, who form part of the FarmSol development programme in Taung, North-West, last year received R8 million of tractors and farming equipment, thanks to a partnership between FarmSol and South African Breweries (SAB).

To further improve their productivity and efficiency, in February they received a John Deere S670 harvester between FarmSol and the South African Cultivar Technology Agency (SACTA).

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During the handover at Ipelegeng Co-operative in the Greater Taung Municipality, Siphso Sebinda, chairperson of the Tshwarangano Co-operative, which houses and manages the equipment on behalf of the farmers, said the arrival of the harvester was perfectly timed, as farmers last season lost a large portion of soya bean because of the late arrival of harvesting contractors.

He thanked SACTA for placing their trust in the farmers and pledged that the farmers would buy another harvester in the future.

Andrew Bennet, CEO of SACTA, said the agency became aware of the struggles of the farmers to harvest on time because of their dependence on contractors last year when the agency inspected the performance of seed supplied to the farmers.

He pointed out that the new harvester was not a grant, but in the form of an interest free loan that had to be repaid over three years.

“The money should be repaid so we can support other groups. Having FarmSol support these farmers helps to derisk the loan,” said Bennet.

Aron Kole, managing director of FarmSol, said the machines supplied to the farmers last year allowed them to plant 1 500ha of soya bean, while the harvester will allow them to harvest the crop on time.

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He said the region had a lot of underutilised land and he hoped the mechanisation efforts would help to unlock the full potential of the land and farmers in the region.

“The farmers here are highly committed, but they struggled because they had no means to work the land and were dependent on others to do so for them. The machines will allow them to take more control over production and do the right thing at the right time. Failure to plant, spray or harvest on time has a huge impact on farm incomes.”

Since it was started in 2016, FarmSol had unlocked over R800 million in production loans for developing farmers and supported 1 887 farmers across all nine provinces in South Africa.

The company started out supporting farmers to grow maize, barley and hops, supplied for the brewing of beer, but has since branched out to also include soya, groundnuts, wheat, canola and sunflower in its portfolio.

Developing farmers in the FarmSol programme are linked to suppliers of raw materials of large multinational companies, like SAB, Siqualo Food, and Southern Oil, thereby creating a secure market for grains produced.

Moses Maqebelo, one of the farmers in the Taung programme, was overjoyed at the arrival of the new harvester. He told Farmer's Weekly that farmers in the region are held back because they are unable to secure finances to buy machines and inputs.

The partnership between FarmSol, SAB and SACTA, however, is helping to address this issue, and in effect unlocking the potential from farmers in the programme. "Without the support of FarmSol, most of the farmers here won't be able to plant anything."

Richard Segwai, another farmer in the programme, said it is much better for the farmers to have their own machines than to be dependent on contractors.

"It is not just about doing things on time, but also about doing things efficiently. We have a vested interest in our crops, whereas some contractors just want to get the job done and don't really care about how they do it."

Victoria Seikaneng said the arrival of tractors, cultivators, planting discs and fertiliser spreaders have already saved the farmers money, because they no longer had to pay contractors to do the job for them.

Farmer Lucia Towe added it helped that the machines were close by as this saved fuel costs but also meant there were no long waits for work to be done. She pointed out that the co-operative works out a schedule of when and where the machines should be used.

Matthews Senokwane, also a farmer in the programme, said he was grateful for the machines as they would improve the lives of farmers in the programme, and the services offered. "We can have finance and machines, but these will mean nothing without the technical production support offered by FarmSol staff, and in this case Lucas Serage."

